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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Raised Bills 6696 and 6959

Good afternoon, Sen. Bartolomeo, Rep. Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

My name is Ren Brockmeyer and I am a Policy Analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy work at the Capitol and program work in low-income communities.

We want to address Raised Bill 6696, An Act Concerning Workforce Development, and Raised Bill 6959, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Develop a Pilot Earn and Learn. A key element for eliminating poverty is access to post-secondary education and workforce training. My testimony today is for your continued support of the Developmental Education Reform.

Remedial education has the potential to help many adults complete their education and become engaged members of their communities, proudly provide for their families, and to be a part of the workforce that re-grows Connecticut. This initiative has a much greater impact because it provides the opportunity for the children in these families to also prosper and grow into our next generation of Connecticut's citizenry.

Students in this developmental education target population are adults with a high school diploma or GED, working in low skill, low wage employment trying to support themselves or their families. According to data from the American Community Survey from 2009 – 2013, **37% of households** in Connecticut headed by adults aged 22 – 45 with high school diplomas or GEDs live below 200% of poverty. This translates to about **44,500 families, not individuals, families.**

Higher education and improved employment opportunities are not just an individual opportunity. Higher education and improved employment opportunities provide upward movement for whole families, communities and Connecticut. Without developmental education programs adults in need of post secondary education remain dependent upon "survival income" in low-skill, low-pay jobs.

Without upward movement into higher income brackets, families remain in need of state assistance, employers remain without a skilled workforce, and Connecticut's revenues stagnate.

Raised Bills 6696 and 6959 address Connecticut's need for improved workforce development initiatives. Raised Bill 6696, An Act Concerning Workforce Development, will help the state when considering other avenues for developing an industry ready workforce while meeting realistic employment opportunities. This study is necessary to aid in improving current policy, something CAHS supports.

To this point, Raised Bill 6959, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Develop a Pilot Earn and Learn Program, is an opportunity to expand the capacity of learning to include practical application in real working environments that will develop the agility and discipline students need in the workforce. No amount of classroom simulation can replicate the energy and experience attained in a true working environment.

CAHS supports the bill. We believe, however, that in an effort to reach the greater post secondary education community, legislators may want to consider expanding the representation on the task force to include the Adult Education sector. This inclusion would assist in expanding opportunity for students in developmental programs. Earn and Learn is a great learning initiative that can enhance students' motivation and persistence to complete certificates and degrees.

Thank you for your time.